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districts develop
a philosophy of
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A GUIDE TO HELP MONTANA SCHOOL

DISTRICTS DEVELOP A PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION

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A guide to help Montana school districts



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INTRODUCTION

The function of this guide is to assist school districts in developing written statements of educational goals and philosophy. Written statements will lend stability to the district's established goals and philosophy and will provide a common point of reference for the school and community as they continue to re-examine their educational practices and programs.

This guide discusses who should be involved in developing statements of goals and philosophy and how these people might proceed in developing the statements. In addition, there are definitions of key educational terms used in the guide and a hypothetical sample philosophy of education and statement of goals.

WHY HAVE WRITTEN GOALS AND PHILOSOPHY?

Every educator, whether he realizes it or not, has a general philosophy of education -- a set of beliefs that serves to guide his actions as he carries out his responsibilities as a teacher, supervisor, administrator or counselor.

Every community, like every educator, also has a philosophy or system of beliefs of its own which reflects the type of educational opportunities that the majority of the citizens believe in and are willing to finance. The school district's philosophy of education might be considered a melting pot of ideas, since it represents the beliefs and convictions of all the people.

Unwritten goals and philosophy of school districts often are revised or go unnoticed as changes in personnel occur. Even written goals are sometimes ignored in favor of reacting to an immediate situation. However, if all persons who are in any way involved in education in a community have a part in writing the district's goals and philosophy and if persons new to the district are made aware of them, the continuity of school practices will be strengthened.

Through these goals and philosophy statements, which are based on the ideas and needs of the whole community, effective guidance can be given to different ways of meeting the educational needs of the district's students.

METHODS OF DEVELOPING GOALS AND PHILOSOPHY

Who Should Be Involved?

The goals and philosophy of education must be statements that are representative of the desires and beliefs of a broad cross section of the community. Although the board of trustees has the responsibility for developing the goals and philosophy, it should seek the assistance and involvement of citizens as well as school administrators, teachers and students. By taking advantage of the talents and resources of these persons, the trustees can be more assured of arriving at a workable set of educational goals and a philosophy of education representative of the community as a whole. Representative goals will be lasting and useful and will become a force for constructive change in the educational program of the school.

Representation may include people from the following categories:

1. minority and ethnic groups
2. cross section of the economic structure with consideration for all job classifications
3. rural and urban citizens
4. students
5. parents of enrolled students
6. teachers
7. supportive school staff (custodial, food services, teacher aides, secretaries and clerks)
8. administrators
9. interested community residents who are not parents of enrolled students
10. school board members
11. senior citizens

How Goals and Philosophy Can Be Developed

Local community beliefs, information and resources should be used to provide a starting point to the groups which are working on goals and philosophy. The following ideas can be useful as the development process gets underway.

1. Decide who will be responsible for gathering community beliefs.

The school board and administration may handle this themselves or they may appoint task forces to conduct a poll and provide them with the data.

2. Decide how the beliefs will be gathered.

A systematic procedure for determining community beliefs may include:

- a. open meetings
- b. small discussion groups
- c. external surveys (outside consultants)
- d. analysis of existing data (present goals and philosophy, board minutes, student follow-up studies)

Some tools for collecting beliefs include:

- a. written questionnaires
- b. taped or written interviews and pictures
- c. speak-ups (students, civic groups, "party line," etc.)

3. Formulate questions about the community's needs.

- a. What do the people want their schools to become in the next two to five years? What is realistic?
- b. What do the people want their schools to do for students?
- c. What are the school system's present strengths?
- d. What are its weaknesses?
- e. What information can be derived from the present written or unwritten goals and philosophy?

4. Utilize factual information and resources.

- a. number of students enrolled
- b. the rate at which the district is gaining or losing population
- c. the number, kinds and conditions of buildings
- d. present cost per student for present educational offerings
- e. the curriculum and extracurricular activities

WRITING GOALS AND PHILOSOPHY

The people charged with the responsibility of writing the goals and philosophy should consider some of the following ideas as they begin their work.

1. Be sure that the goals and philosophy reflect what the community wants its schools to do for its students.
2. Make provisions to periodically revise the goals and philosophy.
3. Include goals in categories of immediate, short-term, long-range and on-going.
4. Write the philosophy so that it can be understood by all.
5. Give attention to the difference between a school's philosophy of education and statements of school board policy. (See section on definition of educational terms.)
6. Request assistance from the State Superintendent's office when necessary.

POSSIBLE GOALS FOR EDUCATION

Following are some examples of goals for the schools of Montana. In each category the goals are expressed in three ways and can be used as a reminder of the kinds of goals which may be considered. They are presented as suggestions only. Each school district must develop its own goals based on the desires and beliefs of its own citizens.

AESTHETIC SENSIBILITY

Each student should:

Acquire knowledge of man's achievements in art, music and literature; or,
Acquire knowledge and skills for developing an appreciation of beauty; or,
Create something of beauty for himself and others.

ATTITUDE TOWARD LEARNING

Each student should:

Acquire a positive attitude toward learning processes; or,
Apply a dedication to learning; or,
Develop a commitment to learning.

CAREER EDUCATION

Each student should:

Develop skills necessary for entering employment; or,
Select and pursue a career; or,
Learn his career opportunities and capabilities.

CITIZENSHIP

Each student should:

Become a responsible citizen; or,
Learn the rights and responsibilities of citizenship; or,
Develop skills for participating in political processes.

COGNITIVE ABILITY AND ACCUMULATION OF KNOWLEDGE

Each student should:

Develop skills in gathering, organizing and using information; or,
Develop and apply skills which define and fulfill his or her learning needs throughout life; or,
Develop knowledge and skills in reading, writing and mathematics.

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Each student should:

Develop effective communication skills; or,
Learn to exchange information, ideas and feelings; or,
Develop skills in reading, writing, speaking and listening.

CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

Each student should:

Acquire knowledge and skills to purchase goods and services that are appropriate to his or her needs and resources; or,
Develop skill in the purchase and use of goods and services; or,
Develop abilities to solve consumer problems.

CRITICAL THINKING AND SCIENTIFIC UNDERSTANDING

Each student should:

Be able to recognize, define and seek solutions to problems; or,
Develop knowledge of and skill in the logical processes of analysis, problem solving and evaluation; or,
Develop and apply skills of creative and critical thinking.

ENVIRONMENTAL ADAPTATION

Each student should:

Acquire knowledge of the nature of the environment; or,
Live in harmony with and improve the environment; or,
Respect his environment.

FAMILY SOCIAL UNIT

Each student should:

Develop skill in the creation of a suitable home environment; or,
Develop appreciation for present and future relationships and responsibilities within family groups; or,
Develop an understanding of his or her role and the roles of others as members of a family.

INTERPERSONAL SKILLS

Each student should:

Learn to live in harmony with others; or,
Develop competence in relating to groups; or,
Gain understanding of those factors which affect human behaviors.

PERSONAL CHARACTER

Each student should:

Develop competence in judging his or her behavior; or,
Understand qualities of character; or,
Develop and apply standards of morality to his or her behavior.

PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH

Each student should:

Learn to develop mental and physical health; or,
Develop habits and skills necessary to maintain physical fitness
and mental health; or,
Become dedicated to maintaining a healthy mind and body.

RECREATIONAL BEHAVIOR

Each student should:

Participate in recreational activities of his or her choice; or,
Develop skill in the creative use of leisure time; or,
Acquire attitudes and knowledge needed for participation in both mental
and physical recreational activities.

SAMPLE STATEMENT OF GOALS AND PHILOSOPHY

The following statement of goals and philosophy is intended to be used as a guideline only and should not be adopted by an individual school. It is essential that a school district's goals and philosophy reflect the beliefs, principles, attitudes and aspirations of the district itself in order to best meet the needs of the students.

The overall purpose of education in our schools and community is to enable all persons involved in our educational programs to obtain a sense of independence of accomplishment in life. Clearly, in today's complicated technological society, no one can be completely independent from the rest of the world. Indeed, the circumstances of our times seem to encourage increased dependency on one another. As our population increases, the need for interdependence becomes even more magnified.

Yet we believe it is important that each individual have an equal opportunity to develop whatever talents and skills he may possess and be given an opportunity to fulfill his personal ambitions and goals. Each should have freedom of choice in selecting his goals as well as in how he will achieve them. Our increased interdependence should not strip individuals of their sense of personal worth. We contend that the role of education should be to educate for increased independence of accomplishment and for fulfillment in a complicated interdependent society. To accomplish this we see our energies being directed toward these major goals:

GOAL 1: INCREASING CHOICE IN HOW PEOPLE WILL MAKE A LIVING

The first goal of education is to insure that the individuals of our community have ample opportunity to exercise intelligent free choice in how they are going to make a living. This goal recognizes no limitation based on geographical area or time. Further, it implies that education is a lifelong process.

GOAL 2: EDUCATING FOR DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP

The second goal is to enable persons in our community to fully participate in our democratic society. This goal includes more than insuring that persons understand the mechanics of our political system. They also must recognize and appreciate the individual rights and obligations inherent within the system and subsequently must become involved in its operation.

GOAL 3: DEVELOPING AND TRANSMITTING A CULTURAL AWARENESS

The third goal of education is to enable individuals to develop and transmit an awareness and understanding of all cultures (their language, art, music, history and literature), life styles and values. Our educational programs and practices will not denigrate any culture on the basis of race, socio-economic status or ethnic origin. Our schools will involve students in the study of people -- how they live and communicate with each other. Our schools will not fragment the curriculum into isolated disciplines but will give the students an opportunity to improve our community by offering them interdisciplinary courses focusing on relevant social concerns.

GOAL 4: DEVELOPING EFFECTIVENESS IN HUMAN RELATIONS

The final goal of education is to prepare individuals to live effectively with themselves and others. They must experience a sense of usefulness, belonging and fulfillment both in the schools and in their daily lives. Our school programs must provide this experience by giving the students ample opportunities to learn how to communicate with others and participate cooperatively in group efforts.

Unless these educational goals and the underlying philosophy of independence of accomplishment for individuals of our community can be directly related to the major social problems of the time, the terminal behaviors from the educational experience will be largely irrelevant. Education in our community must keep pace with social change and social problems locally and nationally. In this period of history every indicator of any depth clearly shows that the major social problems of our time are (1) alienating and dividing prejudices, (2) large scale impersonal organizational structures, (3) lack of appropriate use and care of the natural environment and (4) the increasing number of persons without usefulness or competence for vocational success. The philosophy and goals described here are intricately tied to the development of an educational program that is an antidote to our present major social problems. It is not enough that our schools prepare people for the demands of the society in which they live or for dealing with changes as they occur. We must also develop people who can creatively shape their society to eliminate these major social problems and those problems which may evolve from a changing society.

DEFINITIONS

Educational Philosophy

An encompassing statement of beliefs, attitudes, aspirations and convictions held by an individual or group regarding education.

Goals

Broad statements of purpose that are designed to give general direction to educational practices and programs.

In the operation of a school district, there are usually two different kinds of goals.

1. Student Centered Goals which state what you believe the students should be expected to do as a result of their educational experiences.

Example: Each student will develop a saleable skill by the time he completes high school.

2. Facilitative Goals which determine how you organize, what will be taught, how it will be taught, and where it will be taught.

Example: The curriculum will be structured for continual progress, teaching strategies will center around individual instruction and the media center will be the center of student learning activities.

Objectives

Statements of purpose which, under certain circumstances (e.g., skill training) may incorporate specific criteria for achieving goals in terms of time, procedure and level of accomplishment.

Example: To improve the physical strength of seventh grade boys as determined by each boy's ability to increase by three the number of push-ups performed after two weeks' participation in physical education class.

Policy

Written statements of regulations and specific procedures for the day-to-day operation of a local school district.

Examples: When teachers, as individuals, make public statements to the press, it is necessary that they identify themselves as individuals and not as school spokesmen.

All teachers shall be in their classrooms by 8:15 a.m. and shall not leave their school building until 4:45 p.m.

